

Ven. Eindobhasa

# HISTORY OF BUDDHISM IN ARAKAN

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CHAPTER - VIII

THE CONTACT OF ARAKANESE BUDDHISM WITH OUTER WORLD

I - Arakan and the Indian Subcontinent (including Bangladesh)

As Buddhism was introduced in Arakan before the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D or in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century A.D. naturally Arakan had contacts with the eastern part of India. Buddhism developed in Arakan during Chandra period (c.A.D. 370-790).

According to the Arakanese chronicle, numerically and culturally the Arakanese came to Tripura, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Chittagong before the 10th century A.D. and they settled at those regions. In c.A.D. 1112, Alaung-si-thu succeeded his father, Kyansittha of Pagan. At that time, in Arakan an usurper had driven out the rightful heir, who had fled to Pagan, where he subsequently died. His son, Letyaminnan, with Alaung-si-thu's assistance, recovered the throne of Arakan and was charged by King of Pagan to discharge his debt by repairing the Bodh-Gaya temple. King of Arakan, Letyaminnan led the mission. He repaired the sacred shrine with the support of Alaung-si-thu of Pagan.<sup>1</sup> An inscription found there, tells of the mission which he sent for the purpose of repairing the Bodh-Gaya temple.

In c.A.D. 1283, King Min-htee, son of Min-bhi-lu, ascended the throne in Arakan. During the reign of King Min-htee, Ven.Dhammarāzāguru who led the mission was sent to Bodh-Gaya by King of Arakan in c.A.D.



1305<sup>2</sup>

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In the middle of the 17th century the Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts were annexed by the Mughals and fighting broke out between them and Arakanese. In 1666, Chittagong and Chittagong Hill Tracts became a dominion of Mughal rulers. The Mughal rule lasted in the Chittagong upto c.A.D. 1760, when the reign was ceded to the East Indian Company. Subsequent British administrators permitted the system of dominion by Chakma Chief to continue largely untouched until 1901, when they introduced the Hill Tracts Manual. In 1774, the political situation in Arakan being unsettled, the Boi Min Kaung Hla Phru trekked back to Chittagong. The fertile plains where their ancestors lived, were found to be occupied. In 1822, Bandarban was founded by Kaung Hla Phru and Kyaw Zaw Than was appointed as Mong Rājā in 1860 by the British Government.

After the King of Ava conquered Arakan in 1784, the Arakanese fled to the East Bengal to save their lives from the cruel control of the Burmese. Capt. Hiram Cox allowed to settle more than ten thousands in the large area of the waste land in the Chittagong district.

In 1851, Chandra Mohan Bhikkhu, a young monk of 17 years, of Unaipura Chittagong, took higher ordination and came to Calcutta to study Buddhism. He lived in Mahānagara Vihara of Calcutta. In 1853, he met Mr. Paul in Calcutta who had come from Ceylon. Mr Paul was a great Buddhist scholar, and he discussed about Buddhism with Chandra Mohan

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who came to know that he was not a pure monk in the Theravāda Buddhism. According to the Theravāda Buddhist tradition, a person below 20 years of age is not allowed to take the higher ordination. But he was only a Sāmanera or novice in the Buddha Sāsana. Mr. Paul was kind enough to teach him Buddhism and Pāli. He advised Chandra Mohan that he should visit either Ceylon or Burma. In 1853, he went to Arakan and met Sangharājā Ven. Sāramedha at Akyub in Arakan. He was re-ordained by Ven. Sāramedha who taught the Theravāda Vinaya to him for two months in Sangharājā monastery at Akyab. Ven. Sāramedha was requested by him to reform the Chittagong Buddhist Saṅgha in order to establish Theravāda Buddhism. Then he came back to Chittagong. He preached about Theravāda Buddhism to lay-people there and tried to convince the monks who forgot their own religion in Vinaya. At the time, the Chittagonian Buddhist monks mostly ignored the Theravāda Buddhism. The Chittagong Barua Buddhists used to perform various Hindu rites and worshipped deities and Hindu panths on such as Durga, Kali and Lakshmi and others. They worshipped even Muslim-Pirs and offered animal-sacrifices to gods and goddesses.<sup>3</sup>

In the first half of the 19th. century, while Theravāda Buddhism was being followed and practised in Burma and Ceylon, the Buddhists of Chittagong deviated from the path of Vinaya and were following a form of Buddhism which was not consistent with the basic principles of the Dhamma. In Chittagong, there are three groups of Buddhists [Marma (Arakanese); Chakma ; and Barua] The Marma, Mugh and Arakanese belong to the same race, the same ancestor, language and culture. Their



original home-land is Arakan. But these Arakanese settled in Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Tripura before the 10th century A.D. Such was the condition of Buddhism in Chittagong when Chandra Mohan, came back to his native place. Unfortunately, his aim in religion suffered while he was ill. Soon after he became a lay-man against his wishes. After his recovery, he went to Burma with Sinhalese monks and lay-people" They were ordained by Mahānāyaka of Burma in the Kalyāṇisīmā at Pegu. At this time, Chandra Mohan assumed the name of 'Puṇṇācāra Dhammadhāra' and went to Ceylon to study Buddhism.

In 1856,<sup>4</sup> Saṅgharājā Ven. Sāramedha came to Chittagong at the request of Chandra Mohan. He was accompanied by a group of Arakanese Buddhist mission. The mission proceeded to Sītākunda village, 20 miles north-west of Chittagong. Ven. Sāramedha preached the teachings of Lord Buddha to the Chittagonian Buddhist monks and lay-people. While Saṅgharājā was staying in that village, Ven. Rōdhu Mathe came to meet Saṅgharājā and discussed with him the dark condition of Buddhism in the Chittagong region. Ven. Sāramedha was invited by him to Fahatāliram (Mahāmuni village) and Saṅgharājā while his members of mission proceeded from Sītākunda to Mahāmuni village during the famous Mahāmuni fair, where Buddhists of all communities (Arakanese, Chakma and Barua) assembled. At the auspicious time, Saṅgharājā gave a sermon. He was delighted with the discussion with the senior monks and the influential lay-people about Theravāda Buddhism in the East Bengal. The Chittagong Buddhist monks, who understood about the



Theravâda Vinaya, wished to get re-ordained under the leadership of Saṅgharâjâ, as they realised that they were not pure monks according to the Theravâda Buddhism. During the religious Mahāmuni fair, the higher ordination ceremony was newly held under the leadership of Saṅgharâjâ in the Udakukkhepasîmâ at Mahāmuni village in 1856. But some elder monks showed unwillingness to take the new higher ordination and they stayed separated from them. Because of their old age, they could not follow the Theravâda Vinaya strictly. Later on they were known as a sect which called themselves Sthavira group. Saṅgharâjâ spent his remaining days in the same village and taught Vinaya and Buddhism to the new monks.

Queen Kâlindî (1830-1873),<sup>5</sup> who ruled the Chakma area, was a follower of Hinduism and Tantricism. When Saṅgharâjâ Ven. Sâramedha's fame reached her, she invited him. In 1857, Saṅgharâjâ Sayâdaw Sâramedha came to Rangâmâti, the city of the Chakma area and he preached about the Theravâda Buddhism to her and her people. Ven Sâramedha was honoured by the Queen with the title of "Saṅgharâjâ Vinayadhara" in November, 1857. She constructed a Buddhist monastery at Raj Nagar, the former capital of the Chakma rulers, and requested Saṅgharâjâ to stay in this monastery. He lived in Raj Nagar, struggled to spread Theravâda Buddhism, and thousands of lay-people were converted in Chitagong and Hill area.

Queen Kâlindî erected a big Buddha image and named it Sakyamuni. In 1866, Puññâcâra Dhammadhara came back from Ceylon. He was conferred



the succession of Saṅgharâṇa in his missionary efforts. He himself joined this movement of reformation and preached the doctrine of Lord Buddha. He trained the monks who were interested to learn Theravāda Buddhism. Afterwards he advised the Queen to build an Uposatha hall for the ordination and Uposatha ceremony, because the Udagukkhepasîmā is not always suitable to hold the religious ceremony, according to Vinaya. The Queen invited Saṅgharâṇa from Arakan for this purpose. In 1870, Saṅgharâṇa founded the Uposathasîmā in northern side of the Sakyamuni temple, in the presence of Buddhist Saṅgha. It was the first Uposathasîmā in the East Bengal after the revival of Theravāda Buddhism by the Saṅgharâṇa. After the completion ceremony, Ven. Sāramedha left for Ceylon and Burma.

Queen Kâlindî wished to translate the religious book known as 'Dhātuvamsa' from Arakanese into Bengali. In the Dhātuvamsa, the lives of some previous Buddhas including Dîpinkara Buddha to Gotama Buddha, are mentioned. After it was translated into Bengali, under the title 'Baudharanjika'. It was distributed freely among the subjects of Queen Kâlindî on her desire.

In 1877,<sup>6</sup> Ven. Sāramedha visited Chittagong for the last time and handed the charge of Saṅgharâṇa Nikāya over to Ven. Puññācara. In his life-time, Ven. Sāramedha was conferred three honourable titles. In 1846, British Government honoured him with the title of 'Sāramedhālinkārabhitti Sāsana dhaja Mahādhammarājāti Rājaguru'. In 1857, Ven. Sāramedha accepted the honourable title of 'Saṅgharâṇa



Vinayadhara' from Queen Kāḷindī in Raj Nagar of Chittagong Hill tracts. In 1867, King Mindon of Upper Burma offered him the honourable title of 'Sāramedhābhitti Sāsanadhaja Mahādhammarājādhirājāguru' at Mandalay during the ceremony of the 5th Buddhist Sangha Council.

In 1891, Anākārika Dhammapāla visited to Akyab of Arakan and organised the Mahābodi Society. On his return to India, he requested Sangha Nāyaka of Arakan to send some young novices to India. He handed over to him two novices named Chanda and Suriya to study Buddhism in India. They came to India together with Anākārika Dhammapāla in 1891. Later on, Chanda became Chandramani and Suriya went back home. Chandramani studied Pāli, Sanskrit and Hindi. he was an expert in all three languages.

In 1895, Chandramani met Ven. Mahāvira Swami, an Indian Buddhist monk and U Khee Zā Hree (an Arakanese) at Calcutta. In 1903, Chandramani was ordained by Shwe Hin Tha Sayādaw, who led Burmese and Arakanese Buddhist monks at Ramu of Bangladesh. The higher ordination ceremony was supported by U Khee Zā Hree and the Arakanese people. Thereafter, Rev. Chandramani came to Kushinagar in U.P. and started living there. Soon, he managed to get possession of the Nirvana temple and made it a living shrine. In 1910, he constructed a shelter Dharmasālā for the pilgrims from different parts of India and abroad. In the same year, he managed to erect the Dharamsālā at Sarnath of Varanasi. The Dharmasālā of Sarnath known as Dharmasālā Vināya or Dharma Dhamma



vinâr , was erected by U Mra Tun from Arakan. In 1924, he celebrated for the first time the Buddha Jayanti at Kushinagar. Now it is a regular feature. He established a primary free school in 1934, and a degree College (Buddha Degree College) in 1944 at Kushinagar. After India became independent, he got Indian citizenship.

In 1956, he was selected as the leader of Indian Buddhist delegation for the 6th. Buddhist Saṅgha Council of Burma. The Indian Government sent a Buddhist delegation to Rangoon. At the inauguration ceremony of the 6th. Buddhist Saṅgha Council, he addressed in Hindi and his nephew, U Kittima translated into Burmese. Dr. Ambedkar met him at Rangoon in this occasion and he was surprised at his speech, because Ven. Chandramani was an Arakanese Buddhist monk, but he gave his speech in Hindi well. Dr. Ambedkar gave his full respect to him and discussed Buddhism. Ven. Chandramani was well versed in Buddhism, was expert in Pāli, Sanskrit and Hindi. He was kind enough to guide Dr. Ambedkar in the field of Buddhism.

After his discussion with Ven. Chandramani, Dr. Ambedkar got back to India and arranged to hold the ceremony of religious conversion at Nagapur. Ven. Chandramani returned to India, soon he converted thousands of the Indian. In India today, Ven. Chandramani, is regarded as an initiator of Theravāda Buddhism in India.

In 1953, he established the Kushinagar Bhikkhu Saṅgha. He also became the president of All India Bhikkhu Saṅgha, He ordained many Indian



disciples and sent them to Burma and Ceylon to study Buddhism. Among them, Dr. Dharma Rakkhita was a good scholar in Buddhism. Rahula Sankritjayan also was a close friend and was always helped with necessary things by Ven. Chandramani. He translated many Pâli text books into Hindi. As his nephew, U Kittima is a good Buddhist scholar, he translated RÂMÂYANA into Burmese. The Burmese RÂMÂYANA was published by the Ramakrishna mission of Rangoon.

At present, thousands of Arakanese live in the south-eastern part of India, in the north-eastern part of the Hill Tracts, in the southern part of the Chittagong district and Patuakhali area. There are about 20,000 Arakanese and about 100 Arakanese Buddhist monasteries in the different parts of Bangladesh. In 1979, "Bangladesh Marma Buddhist Welfare Orphanage" was established by Ven. Dharmananda who is running the educational and cultural studies centre at Bandarban. In 1980, "Bangladesh Rakhaing Marma Buddhist Sangha Council" was founded by Ven. U Pandita Mahāthera at Cox's bazaar. The council has a programme to publish the Arakanese culture and religious text books.

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## II - Religious Relations Between Arakan and Sri Lanka (Ceylon)

Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka (Ceylon) by Thera Mahinda who came to the Island in about the middle of the 3rd century<sup>7</sup> B.C in the reign of King Asoka. It is generally accepted that at the time of the introduction of Buddhism, there was no organised religion in Ceylon. Owing to the popular enthusiasm, Buddhism became the state religion in Ceylon, under Royal patronage.

The Mahâvihara was established at Anurâdhapura in 3rd century B.C.<sup>8</sup> In later times, Mahâvihâra became the great centre of Buddhist culture. As Mahâvihâra was famous Buddhist study centre, Abhayagiri vihâra constructed by Vattagamani Abhaya (29-17 B.C.)<sup>9</sup> also became a great centre in Ceylon in the 1st century B.C.

The later part of the 1st century B.C. saw some very important events in the Buddhist history of Ceylon. From 43 B.C. for 14 years, five Tamils ruled in succession at Anurâdhapura. King Vattagamani lay in hiding in a remote palace during this period. In 1st century B.C. Mahâchûlika Mahâtissa was succeeded by Vattagamani's son, Choranaga. He was hostile and destroyed eighteen vihâras where he had not been given refuge during the days of his rebellion against his cousin Mahâchûlika Mahâtissa (17-3 B.C.)<sup>10</sup>

In addition to these calamities the whole country was ravaged by an unprecedented famine, generally known as BrahmanaTissa famine or



aminitiyâsyâ. The people had no food at all and were forced to cannibalism, even eating the flesh of Buddhist monks whom they venerated. Many thousands, both Buddhist monks and lay-people, perished, many vihâras were deserted, the Mahâvihâra at Anurâdhapura was entirely abandoned, trees grew in the countryard, and the Mahâthûpa itself lay in complete neglect. Many monks left the Island and went to India. The country was in chaos.<sup>11</sup>

The elder monks of the Sinhalese saw that the future of Buddhism was in danger. The continuation of the tradition of the three Pitaka, which had so far been handed down orally from teacher to pupils, appeared no longer possible. The main concern of the Sangha during this tragic period was to preserve the teaching of Lord Buddha, which they valued above all else. Therefore, far-seeing Mahâthera, under the patronage of a local chief, assembled at Aluvihâra at Mâtale, and for the first time in history committed to writing the whole of the Tri Pitaka with the commentaries thereon "in order that the true doctrine might endure".<sup>12</sup>

In the first century A.D. there was the beginning of dissensions in the Sangha which had till then been united under the influence of the Mahâvihâra. At later times, the Dhammaruci sect (Abhayagiri vihâra group) became a separate group from Mahâvihâra known as Jetavana sect. Mahâvihâra Buddhism was replaced in Ceylon as a new religion in second century A.D.



According to the Arakanese chronicles, the relation between Ceylon and Arakan began from the second century A.D.<sup>13</sup> During the reign of King Thuriyathiri (c.A.D. 201-221)<sup>14</sup>, twelve Arakanese monks led by Nānasiridhipadhi Mahāthera were sent for missionary purpose to Ceylon. It was the first relationship between the two countries. According to the Chūlavamsa, Vijayabahu - I (1065-1120) sent envoys with valuable gifts to Anuradha. The king of Rāmañña (Lower Burma) sought his assistance in the struggle against the Chola invaders. But there is not much evidence that the King of Rāmañña sent his troops to aid the King of Ceylon. K.L.Hazra says "During this time, Theravāda Buddhism was in a flourishing condition in lower Burma"<sup>15</sup>. The conquest of Thaton in 1057 was a great event in Burmese history. After the conquest of Thaton, Pagan became a famous Buddhist centre in South-East Asia.

In the same period, we believe that Arakan was the centre of original teachings of Lord Buddha and Arakanese chronicles also mention the religious relationship between Arakan and Ceylon. But the Ceylon are silent on Arakan's relation with Ceylon in this period. According to Arakanese chronicles, during the reign of Datharāzā (1123-1139),<sup>16</sup> The King of Ceylon sent envoys for religious purpose. The King of Arakan, Datharaza sent a Buddhist mission led by Ven. Atulavijaya Mahāthera. Twenty-six venerable ones accompanied him.<sup>17</sup>

The Polannaruva slab inscription of the Velaikkaras (c.A.D. 1137-



(1153)<sup>18</sup> also refers to the purification of the Saṅgha of the three sects of Ceylon with the help of the monks from Arumana during Vijayabahu-I's time. Arumana may be suggested as Arakan. In 1166,<sup>19</sup> King Manjuthin was succeeded by his son, Ngaraman. During his time, a religious mission including 36 Buddhist monks were sent to the King of Ceylon, Parakramabahu-I (c.A.D. 1153-1186). This mission was led by Ven. Uttara Dhamma. But the period between the death of Vijayabahu I and Parakramabahu I can be described as a dark chapter in the history of Ceylon. According to K.L. Hazra "During this period neither the Burmese sources such as the Sāsana-vamsa, the Glass Palace Chronicle nor the Sinhalese sources such as Chūlavamsa mention any religious or political contact between Ceylon and Burma".<sup>20</sup>

In Arakanese history, Mrauk-U signifies the golden age. The 15th and 16th centuries A.D. were important landmarks in the history of both Arakan and Ceylon. There is evidence to show that during these centuries close political, cultural and religious ties existed between the two countries. King Ba-saw-phru (1459-1482) received three Piṭakas from Ceylon in c.A.D. 1476,<sup>21</sup> and the King of Arakan sent a religious delegation led by Ven. Siddhattha.

In the 16th century, Arakan was a sea-power of some importance; it built hundreds of galliots and developed great skill in both sea and riverine warfare. During the reign of Nanda Bayin (1581-1599)<sup>22</sup> of Pegu, he wanted to raise and equip new armies to fight against  
equip right



the Siamese like his father Bayin Naung and request the Mons to join the army.<sup>23</sup> Many Mons crossed over the border of Arakan and Siam and took refuge in both countries. Nanda Bayin attacked Siam about five times between 1586 and 1593. He put to death many of their officers and destroyed the country of Mon. Many Mon monks and lay-people left the country and fled to Siam and Arakan. The Siamese attacked Pegu in 1595.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, Arakan defeated and conquered the Pegu and Syriam, one of the import port of Lower Burma. During the reign of Minrâzâkri (1593-1613)<sup>25</sup>, Arakan received the vast loot brought back by its raiders from Pegu together with Nanda Bayin's daughter and white elephant. At the end of the 16th century A.D. Bayin Naung has lost power in the country.

In the 16th century, the relation between Arakan and Ceylon played an important role in Buddhism and culture<sup>26</sup>. As Ola leaf manuscript of the Kakdadora great found in Ceylon, refers to religious intercourse between Rakkhangapūra<sup>27</sup> and Ceylon. This information is corroborated by the Chûlavamsa, the Sulupujavaliya and the Narendracharitâvalokapradipikâva. During the reign of Vimaladhammasuriya-I, when Ceylon was in need of some monks to restore the Buddhist Sangha, the King of Ceylon sent an envoy to Rakkhangapūra and invited a Buddhist mission for restoring the Sangha. At that time, King Khaung-râzâ (1521-1631)<sup>28</sup> ruled in Arakan. He appointed his son, Min bar as a governor of Sandoway. Prince Min-bar selected Ven. Tejosâra from Sandoway and Ven. Dhammavilâsa from Mrauk-U to send on a religious mission. The



King of Ceylon warmly received the two Arakanese monks who came to preach the teachings of the Buddha in Ceylon.

The Arakanese monks were given the sacred tooth relic of Lord Buddha which Ceylon proudly possessed on their return. They brought it and gave it to Min-bar as a gift from the King of Ceylon. In the reign of Min-rāzā-kri, an envoy with the gift arrived in Mrauk-U and King of Arakan sent 20 Buddhist monks led by Ven. Chandavilāsa Mahāthera to Ceylon. They arrived there in 1563. They reformed the Buddhist Saṅgha and held the higher ordination ceremony in the Udakukkhepapsîmā.

The Chûlavamsa and the Sâsanavamsa contain important evidence relating to the religious intercourse between Arakan and Ceylon in the reign of Vimaladhammasuriya II. Both refer to the arrival of the Sinhalese envoys in Rakkhîṅgapūra<sup>29</sup> and to how the Arakanese monks restored the Buddhist Saṅgha and established the religion in Ceylon. During the reign of King of Mārūpiya (1696-1697), King of Ceylon, Vimaladhammasuriya II sent a mission to Rakkhāṅgapūra. After receiving the message from Sinhalese mission, King Marūpiya selected Ven. Indamanju, the monk-in-charge of Sattathāna monastery and Ven. Nandichakka, the priest of Laung-krat monastery, and sent forty Arakanese monks led by two venerable ones to Ceylon in 1696<sup>30</sup>. When they arrived they were received with great honour and the Upasampada ordination was held under the leadership of Nandichakka in the Udakukkhepasîmā on the Mahāvaluka ganga or



Maliganga at Getambe near Peradeniya in 1696.<sup>31</sup> Several members of the royal and noble families were ordained. Thus Sinhalese Buddhist Sangha was restored by Buddhist monks from Arakan and they held the higher ordination in Ceylon.

A manuscript<sup>32</sup> recording the religious intercourse between Arakan and Ceylon, was discovered at the Kadadora Vihâra in Gannave Korale of Udahevahata in the district of Nuvara Eliya in the central province of Ceylon. The Chûlavamsa, however, does not make any reference to Ven. Chandavilâsa, but only to Ven. Nandichakka.<sup>33</sup> The Sulupâjavaliya mentions the names of both Theras.

In the 16th and 17th centuries, when Buddhist Ceylon had suffered severely as a result of internal trouble and foreign occupation, Arakan helped Ceylon to re-establish and restore religious ceremonies and higher ordination in Ceylon. At present, Theravâda Buddhism of Ceylon is being spread widely in the world and Sinhalese Buddhists have set up famous Buddhist study centres in Ceylon. The Mahâbodhi Society, originating in Ceylon has become the famous Buddhist Research Centre, in the Buddhist world.

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